

Was *The Bell* Modernist?

Frank Shovlin

The Bell believes that the first thing we must do
in Ireland is to see clearly—*voir clair*—
to have the facts and understand the picture.
– Seán O’Faoláin

In *The Irish Times* of 21 October 1950, a scathing, anonymous review of the Dublin-based, John Ryan-edited little magazine *Envoy* was published on the occasion of the journal’s first birthday. At the heart of the critique lay a somewhat disturbing national introversion:

What *Envoy* is, or why, is a little difficult to discover.

The October number is not untypical in this regard. There is no editorial, no voice to deliver any message there may be to guide the people of Ireland. Of its nine articles and stories, six are by or about foreigners, and no particular reason is obvious why they should be published in an Irish magazine – unless Dublin is intended to be the stamping ground of displaced persons.¹

Such xenophobia was unusual in *The Irish Times*, and *Envoy*’s editorial team had no intention of letting the insult stand.

Envoy’s December 1950 editorial, responding to the charges laid out by the *Times*, listed a series of themes which it would not permit to be examined in its pages:

Envoy’s policy, however, remains what it was. We do not intend to print work, for instance, on any of the following unless it has literary value:

1. The Turf Development Board
2. How to live on £400 a year.
3. Borstals and gaols.

4. Holidays in Ireland.
5. Spanish wine, Kathleen Mavourneen, Raftery and the Coombe.
6. Our glorious heritage (whichever one you happen to think of).
7. The Jansenistic Irish.
8. Careers for our girls.²

As well as being a response to the accusation of an unwarranted cosmopolitanism, clearly this list of prohibited subjects is meant as an attack on *The Bell*, *Envoy*'s only serious competitor in the arena of the Irish little magazine, and a journal which put a great deal of stress on articles of a social-realist nature. With this dismissal of *The Bell*, the very deliberately young and raffish *Envoy* exhibits a certain cultural élitism. The journal liked to imagine itself as a gathering point for Ireland's aesthetes and its insistent stress on fine art and the primacy of continental European culture could at times look like crude snobbery, a tendency that clearly rankled with *The Irish Times*' anonymous hatchet man. This high-blown, internationalist aspect of the magazine also grated with some of the more established and socially conservative Irish periodicals. "It is very clearly not what was expected", wrote a reviewer in the Catholic weekly *The Standard*, "there is a Latin Quarter tilt to its hat that would not surprise in St Germain de Pres (where I believe it is quite popular), but is very irritating in the more contemplative and conservative atmosphere of Ireland."³ *Envoy* saw itself as modern and considered *The Bell* part of an older, more introverted and staid reflection of Irish life. It will be the purpose of this essay to consider whether this point of view holds up to scrutiny, and in the process of that consideration to examine *The Bell*'s attitude to modernism and modernity.

Defining what one means by modernism is, of course, the single greatest problem in coming to any worthwhile conclusion about *The Bell*'s position in that

complex matrix. Lauren Arrington, one of the leading scholars currently thinking about the idea of a distinctly Irish strain of modernism says of it – at least in its literary varieties – that it has “stylistic qualities of instability, contingency, and fracture”. So far, so uncontroversial, but she also points to a real danger in diluting the term through sheer ubiquity: “Modernism is separate from modernity, and denotes an experimental style that reacts against conventional forms. If these terms are not carefully defined, then Modernism becomes a useless aesthetic category and is synonymous with the modern”.⁴ *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* hedges its bets, sometimes edging towards a chronological definition of what modernism might be (this tends to vary greatly, but most critics will parcel it off somewhere between 1900 and 1940, with some feeling it had peaked by 1922), and at other moments trying to uncover patterns of praxis within the movement. Two characteristics of modernism are especially germane to my consideration of *The Bell*: the proliferation of manifestos and little magazines, and the inclination, Arrington also points out, to “value ambiguity and complexity”.⁵

If modernism and little magazines are happy bedfellows, then *The Bell* slotting into some sort of modernist Venn diagram at first looks potentially unproblematic as it was a little magazine par excellence both in its material appearance and in its combative issuing of manifestos. Sean Latham has even gone as far as to argue that magazines “run through the very DNA of modernism, their distinctive form magnifying and often anticipating its stylistic innovations”. He goes on, later in his intriguing essay on the parallels and intersections between magazines and modernism, to point to even firmer overlap and influence:

modernism cannot be fully thought or understood apart from the magazines.

Some of its most basic innovations – a fascination with time, a focus on the

everyday, and a widely dispersed fragmentation of realist narrative – are not merely aesthetic effects. They are instead essential to the medium of the periodicals. Magazines of all kinds, from coterie journals to pulps to quality journals, were themselves a kind of modernism and only now can we begin to track their essential role in the staggering cultural and aesthetic innovations of the early twentieth century.⁶

While there is certainly food for thought in such a critical position, the attempt to define, to pick up and examine this most mercurial of artistic terms, is, perhaps, doomed to failure. Under Latham's terms for modernism, *The Bell* certainly – almost neurotically – focussed on the everyday, but nowhere can one find a fascination with time or a marked subversion of realism. Inevitably the magazine is multivocal, but does that mean it values fragmentation? Probably not.

But Latham is certainly not alone in thinking of the little magazine as having an especially intimate relationship with modernism. Ezra Pound – a writer not unfamiliar with manifestos and magazines – wrote in a 1930 essay, 'Small Magazines', what he felt lay at the core of a successful literary periodical. A magazine must have "a clear announcement of a program – any program. A review that can't announce a program probably doesn't know what it thinks or where it is going".⁷ Similarly, Adam McKible and Suzanne Churchill in 'Little Magazines and Modernism' see a curiously compelling overlap between this particularly twentieth-century published miscellany and that century's most powerful literary movement.⁸ *The Bell* is certainly an outspoken little magazine *par excellence*, but does that necessarily make it modernist? As Lauren Arrington points out about early to mid-twentieth-century Irish writing, using *The Bell* as an example of the period's marked heterogeneity,

not all Irish literature written after the Revival was Modernist. This is not to disparage Irish writing but instead is a comment on the variety and richness of the literature of the period. Sean O’Faolain could simultaneously publish realist novels and edit the little magazine *The Bell*, in which radically avant-garde work by the poets Freda Laughton, the novelists Elizabeth Bowen and Flann O’Brien, and painter and playwright Jack B. Yeats appeared.⁹

The Bell certainly did publish experimentalist work, but it was much more likely to favour realism than the avant garde, and Seán O’Faoláin, its guiding light, pined not for some bold subjective future but for the cold objectivity of the nineteenth century and his greatest literary hero Ivan Turgenev. Even if George Lukács could dismiss the nineteenth-century novel as an invention of the bourgeoisie that had, by the 1940s, been “consigned to oblivion”, O’Faoláin, for one, was not in the least interested in such a dismissal.¹⁰

The Bell certainly sought to uphold a higher intellectual standard than it thought was available elsewhere in mid-twentieth-century Ireland. Its manifesto was expounded by O’Faoláin in the opening editorial of October 1940, when he linked his views on the documentary role of the magazine with its title: “That was why we chose the name of *The Bell*. Any other equally spare and hard and simple word would have done; any word with a minimum of associations [...] All our symbols have to be created afresh”.¹¹ That first editorial, in addition to musing on the journal’s title, attacked the backward-looking nature of Irish life. And yet despite his rejection of nationalist symbolism and mythology O’Faoláin turned, perhaps surprisingly, to the executed leader of 1916, Padraig Pearse, to illustrate the way that retrospection must change if Irish symbols are to mean anything:

Men and women who have suffered or died in the name of Ireland, who have thereby died for Life as they know it, have died for some old gateway, some old thistled lagfield in which their hearts have been stuck since they were children. These are the things that come at night to tear at an exile's heart.

These are the true symbols. When Pearse faced death it was of such things he thought.

O'Faoláin went on to make the patriotic role of the journal clearer still: "would it not be foolish, impertinent to talk of 'our' policy; unless by 'our' we mean 'yours' — the immeasurable Irishry of the world?"¹²

The ambiguous attitude to nationalism hinted at in the first editorial permeated O'Faoláin's years at *The Bell*. He had, in the twenty years before its foundation, swung away from republicanism and towards a suspicion of the calcified nationalism which he felt characterized post-revolutionary Ireland, though he never quite moved as far away from the left as many commentators, wishing to see him as a straightforward modernizer in the image of Taoiseach Seán Lemass, would have it.¹³ Whatever O'Faoláin's, and *The Bell's*, politics, one can certainly not accuse either of shying away from issuing manifestos. But in trying to marry the magazine's general thrust to a modernist aesthetics, the case for doing so becomes much less solid once we move beyond the question of political and artistic commitment. Despite *The Bell's* penchant for writing political and aesthetics credos, it would be rather perverse to argue that it was modernist. The journal was, with the exception of a few stray articles, stories and poems (to which I shall return shortly), rigidly historicist. While it had a particular view of the world that was both nationalist and outward facing at the same time, and that believed in artistic value and in its promotion, it did not 'value ambiguity'.

O’Faoláin, in trying to describe and analyse the Ireland of the 1940s, was particularly keen to have his old friend, the novelist, poet and short story writer, Frank O’Connor involved with the new venture and persuaded him to become Poetry Editor and to provide a monthly forum for new Irish poets. The relationship between the two Cork writers was a stormy one and O’Connor’s involvement with the magazine did not endure long. However, the following letter from O’Faoláin to O’Connor reveals the determined and practical way that O’Faoláin went about creating a cultural niche for *The Bell*:

If I can get *The Bell* to take in every sort of person from Kerry to Donegal, and bind them about you and me and Peadar and Roisin do you not see that we are forming a nucleus? Take the long view – bit by bit we are accepted as the nucleus. Bit by bit we can spread ideas, create *real* standards, ones naturally growing out of Life and not out of literature and Yeats and all to that. It is going to take years and years.¹⁴

‘Life’, or ‘real life’ is stressed over and over again by *The Bell* as its primary concern. “Where the forms of life are still in their childhood, as here”, writes O’Faoláin in a 1941 editorial, “the journal is indeed a day-by-day record of each achievement and its chief critical function is to discover and appraise along those lines”.¹⁵ So *The Bell* tends to oppose anything that might be seen as over intellectualized or high blown, or, as O’Faoláin succinctly describes it to O’Connor, ‘literature and Yeats and all to that’. It is all strongly reminiscent of William Dean Howells’ position on realism, that it should “depict things as they are, life as it is.”¹⁶

As early as the second issue of the magazine, O’Faoláin clarified the type of article he desired from contributors: “Do not write articles on abstract topics.”¹⁷ This insistence on portraying the realities of Irish life manifested itself in the broad range

of documentary pieces published each month. Titles such as ‘I Went to America’, ‘I Become a Borstal Boy’, ‘A Day in the Life of a Dublin Mechanic’ and ‘What it Means to be a Unitarian’ became an important part of *The Bell*. O’Faoláin’s clearest statement regarding this commitment to a documentary realist aesthetic came in a 1941 editorial entitled ‘Attitudes’. In this piece he writes of the sacrifices inherent in such an approach: “We have printed things, at times, that were not of the first literary standard because they were real and true, and we would always lean primarily towards reality and veracity rather than towards a superficial literary perfection”.¹⁸

In *The Bell*’s third issue, O’Faoláin had also issued a starkly realist editorial manifesto:

Let us restate our position. *The Bell* believes that the first thing we must do in Ireland is to see clearly—*voir clair*—to have the facts and understand the picture. This has never been attempted before. When Ireland reveals herself truthfully, and fearlessly, she will be in possession of a solid basis on which to build a superstructure of thought; but not until then.¹⁹

But, as with much that O’Faoláin said and did over the years, it would be wrong to take him at face value without very careful consideration. Just because he tells O’Connor that he wants to avoid the difficulties associated with a Yeatsian view of the world does not mean that he does not admire Yeats. “I am a young man,” he admits in a 1935 article for *The English Review*, “and my generation in Ireland sometimes finds it hard to make a bridge across to the generation of Yeats. [...] We feel we are of the age of steel and that these last romantics are of the age of gold”.²⁰ If anything, O’Faoláin felt under pressure to emulate the efforts of Yeats, Lady Gregory and the generation of the Literary Revival. He bemoaned the lack of artistic vibrancy in the Dublin that he saw about him as he launched *The Bell*. It was a city which had,

twenty years previously, become a cultural capital but which had now descended into mediocrity: “no sooner does any man attempt, or achieve, here, anything fine than the rats begin to emerge from the sewers, bringing with them a skunk-like stench of envy and hatred, worse than the drip of a broken drain”.²¹ It was all a bitter disappointment to the man who had once been willing to die for his vision of a new Ireland.

When O’Faoláin finished his period as editor of *The Bell* it was with a sense of failure and of regret. Despite all his polemical efforts, de Valera’s Fianna Fáil were still in power, the Catholic Church reigned supreme, and cultural and economic isolationism continued to hold sway over Irish life. The figure of Yeats weighed heavily on O’Faoláin’s mind:

Indeed Yeats would not much care for this magazine (and I should not blame him), where politics and social problems intrude, and there is much that he would think purely on the ‘surface of life.’ It may be that as he did – and was sorry for it – we have gone too much into the arena, come too close to the battle.

O’Faoláin, as a young revolutionary, had hoped for much, but the new Ireland had delivered little. He would have liked to edit a magazine “as full of poetic visions of ideal life, noble theories, interesting aesthetic ideas as Yeats, say, put into *Samhain*”.²² Given the stagnant nature of mid-century Irish cultural life, however, this aim proved impossible. To produce such a magazine would, in the Ireland of the 1940s, have been to ignore the very real problems faced by the state. O’Faoláin had the intelligence to recognize that under such circumstances *The Bell* required a different lead and so he handed over editorial control to the socialist Peadar O’Donnell in April 1946. For O’Donnell, as for O’Faoláin, the need to look at the development of the nation with clear-eyed accuracy provided a key dynamic in his term as editor. Unlike O’Faoláin,

O'Donnell tended to stress the material rather than the aesthetic strains pressing on the Irish writer and on his environment:

We started off with the legend of a magazine of creative fiction. We found Irish life just could not use that legend. [...] A country wasted by the flight of its youth as ours is, a flight entirely without impulse to high adventure but forced by the general level of home earnings could not fail to score its drab features on the pages of any magazine resting on it.²³

In such a world, debates over the direction that Irish fiction, poetry and the visual arts might take seemed redundant. Modernism, classicism, realism, romanticism would all have to wait for better times to be scrutinized, chosen or rejected by Ireland's little magazines and their readers.

So, the short answer to the question that motivates this essay, 'Was *The Bell* modernist?' is 'No'. That is if we take it that by *The Bell* we mean the editorial outlook adopted by that magazine mainly through Seán O'Faoláin and Peadar O'Donnell. But to speak of the magazine as a single thing or idea is, of course, mistaken. While there are only three articles about Ireland's most important modernist, James Joyce, over the 14-year run, and not a single piece of fiction as experimental as anything in *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*, there are interesting debates about the course that modern writing ought to take. The most notable of such debates took place between O'Faoláin and his poetry editor Geoffrey Taylor (born Geoffrey Phibbs) and revolves around the work of the expat English poets Nick Nichols and Freda Laughton.

Taylor was instrumental in the promotion of Freda Laughton, whose work first appeared in *The Bell* in March of 1944. Later in that year, she also published in *The Irish Times* and would go on to publish for that newspaper a further four times. It was

also in 1944 that Taylor published *Irish Poems of To-Day*, an anthology of the best poetry from the first seven volumes of *The Bell*, and included Laughton in it.

Laughton's time associated with *The Bell* was short, between March of 1944 and July of 1945, and she published just one poem there that was not to appear in her first solo collection *A Transitory House* (1945), the dust jacket of which refers to her as 'a new writer from Ireland'.

Her poem 'The Bombed House' appeared in the March 1944 issue of *The Bell* and is distinctive for its personification of a ruined home after the blitz:

This house has lanes not corridors.

Some walls are cliffs, and some,

Whilst drunkenly dancing,

Committed suicide.

One night the inhabitants

Of this corybantic ruin,

One-time desirable residence

Replete with indigestible furniture,

Aroused without warning into death,

Found their bedroom passage

An unsuspected lane leading

Into the unimaginable.

The personification of inanimate objects, the jarring adjective 'indigestible', the deliberately obscure 'corybantic', and the eccentric and irregular line structure all draw attention to the poem as a challenge to the sorts of formally conservative poetry normally favoured by *The Bell*. Laughton's work deserves to be revisited as a rare example of Irish modernist poetry by a woman writer offering a strikingly unorthodox

female voice at a time where Irish women's poetry was not nearly as visible as it would be some three decades later.

Poetry so far outside of societal and stylistic orthodoxies was bound to draw attention, and after winning *The Bell's* poetry competition in 1944, Laughton's work drew vocal debate from among Ireland's critics. Austin Clarke again displayed his hostility to *The Bell* and its contributors in his review of *A Transitory House* for *The Irish Times*, claiming that although *The Bell's* prose fiction was very specifically grounded in Ireland and in Irish experience, its poetry ran in the opposite direction and was frequently more abstract and modernist: "the short stories and prose sketches in it are so racy of the soil that they are at times embarrassing, but many of the poems have been selected from *Horizon* or any other English modernist compilation."

Although Clarke's identification of the more abstract preferences of Geoffrey Taylor as poetry editor have some credibility, his contention that *The Bell's* prose was 'racy of the soil' is more difficult to justify. If the magazine's prose dealt with Ireland and the Irish then that was present at the conception of the magazine rather than as an accidental after-thought. Clarke further expressed his dissatisfaction with Laughton's work by saying its place was outside of Irish letters entirely: "there is nothing in this collection which has the slightest relation to this country." Outside of questioning Laughton's right to be included amongst Irish letters, Clarke felt that her work was just plain bad: "examples of the horrible ingenuities of the contemporary English poetic mind will be found in the book [...] 'bleating ocean,' 'indigestible furniture', 'emasculated food' and all other prefabricated images." Although Clarke did concede that the collection contained "an occasional [poem] which is both delicate and subtle" his overall opinion was entirely dismissive.²⁴ In these opinions he was supported by a young Frank Harvey who claimed in a letter to *The Bell* that Laughton was only "an

addition to English letters. She derives entirely from the modern school of young English poets [...] To those working for a distinctive Anglo-Irish literature she can be no help. Her work is indistinguishable from the mass of contemporary English poetry by modernists.”²⁵ Harvey was quick to attempt to dismiss any hint of prejudice by finishing his letter thus: “I by no means wish to detract from the value of Ms. Laughton’s work. Undoubtedly she is a poet of fine promise”.²⁶

Valentin Iremonger (who would later go on to be poetry editor at *Envoy*), in the same issue, was kinder to Laughton in his article on the effects of war on Irish poetry.²⁷ He accuses both Clarke and Harvey of missing the point of Laughton’s writing: “Freda Laughton, in common with most of the other younger poets, draws her inspiration from the depths of her experience: that it happens to have taken place in Ireland is of no importance to what she has to say [...] I should not like my poetry to be judged by its ‘Irishness’.”²⁸ Iremonger had been so taken with Laughton’s poetry that he had earlier written an appreciation of it for *The Bell*. For him, Laughton was “one of the most important new Irish poets” whose work was of vital significance to Ireland at that time: “in her realisation that the forces of the individual life engineer the instances of poetic experience and, consequently, of poetry, lies her validity just here and just now.” Iremonger was of the impression that Laughton’s work had the potential to endure; her ability to intellectualise her subjects, and to offer a serious take on the ordinary were promising traits for her future: “there is a great deal of intellection in her work – which is as it should be. Poetry is not a game [...] in her recognition of it lies Freda Laughton’s promise for the future.”²⁹

Laughton’s reputation as a native poet deserving of a place apart from foreign modernism would not have been helped by her association with another controversial poet and painter published in *The Bell*, Nick Nicholls. On 25 April 1945, Geoffrey

Taylor chaired a poetry recital from the works of Laughton and Nicholls at the Contemporary Picture Galleries at 113 Lower Baggot Street. On display were some of Nicholls' most recent paintings and the location had a suitably avant-garde setting, being one of the most prominent art galleries that 'aimed to further the cause of Modernism by exhibiting more radical works than could be seen elsewhere.' Nicholls was an English poet and painter, who moved to Ireland in 1939. There, he joined Basil Rákóczi (1908-79) and Kenneth Hall (1913-46) who had formed the White Stag Group for the advancement of psychological analysis and art. Composed mainly of English expatriates the group was free to explore art unconstrained by the historical legacy that weighed on Irish artists, and thus offered a much needed fresh perspective for Irish painting.³⁰

The White Stag Group received support from *The Bell* as a progressive and modern movement, particularly as it offered an alternative to the Royal Hibernian Academy's yearly exhibits, which were much criticised as conservative and bland. *The Bell* published articles on the Group's 'Exhibition of Living Art' and their 'White Stag' exhibition, and followed their productions with enthusiasm, printing glossy examples from their work. That *The Bell* would promote such painting is perhaps unsurprising considering the group was associated with Mainie Jellett, Nano Reid and Nigel Heseltine. Jellett was a close personal friend of Elizabeth Bowen (onetime mistress of O'Faoláin and contributor to the magazine's opening number), and Bowen published a touching obituary to her in *The Bell* in December of 1944. Nano Reid also featured frequently in *The Bell*, and O'Faoláin published an article on her work in November of 1941. Nigel Heseltine was the son of the English composer Peter Warlock, he was in Ireland for the duration of World War Two, as his father had been

for World War One, and contributed articles to *The Bell* on contemporary Welsh writing.

O’Faoláin delegated the responsibility for the coverage of painting to others, with Anna Sheehy, Elizabeth Curran and Arthur Power submitting the bulk of articles on Irish art. His own tastes were less inclined towards Modernist or abstract painting, preferring the Italian Masters and the pastoral landscapes of his close friend Paul Henry. As we have seen, Austin Clarke felt that *The Bell* travelled in two opposing directions when one looked at its poetry and its prose, between backward-looking short stories and modernist abstract poetry. *The Bell*’s taste in the plastic arts were frequently modern, promoting examples of new directions in town-planning, architecture, painting, sculpture and even furniture making. However, Clarke’s distinction is reductive and does not do justice to the breadth of writing that appeared in what was, after all, primarily a literary journal. Today we are still living with the critical legacy of Clarke’s view of *The Bell* and its writers, which positions them as outside of movements within European literature as a whole and only existing in a reactionary capacity to advances which had taken place around them.

As Alex Davis has argued, the writers of post-independence Ireland were busy adjusting to the difficulties and disappointments of their new reality and this was “shown in the commitment by many to what were essentially mimetic modes of writing – the short stories of Seán O’Faolain and Frank O’Connor and, in the war years, Patrick Kavanagh’s *The Great Hunger* (1942).”³¹ Yet such a view is problematic, in that it establishes a false distinction between progressive experimental writing and an imitative ‘mimetic’ art. O’Faoláin was deeply immersed in the traditions of European literature and his writing should be seen as operating within that tradition; his reasons for rejecting overtly experimental writing were clear. He

chose to operate within the realist mode as he attempted to develop a specific challenge to that tradition, namely in the Catholic novel. To depict his writing as an inward-looking reaction to literary movements elsewhere would be to do a disservice to him, and to the entire project of *The Bell*. Its contributors frequently offered challenging and subversive writing, and Clarke's accusations ring hollow when one considers O'Faoláin's own reasoned analysis of his position and the potential to view his short stories as existing within it. This position is usefully outlined in the debate surrounding the publication of Nick Nicholls' experimental poem 'The Bone and The Flower'.

The experimental format of 'The Bone and the Flower' and the similarity to the avant-garde poetry of the Modernist movement should alert us to the risky strategy that O'Faoláin was following in trying to promote writing that had the potential to alienate much of his readership. He stated as much in his debate with Geoffrey Taylor, which he published alongside the poem, 'Sense and Nonsense in Poetry': "the present discussion centres around the old problem of 'meaning' in poetry and it arose when the Editor was presented with a very long, and interesting, series of verses which the Poetry Editor admires but of which the Editor confesses that he understands but little".³² Taylor was a strong advocate for Nicholls' poem and argues that poetry operates on the level of surface meaning conveyed through its language, but also through association of those words which operate on an emotional level. For Taylor, the first level was the poem's 'sense', and the second emotional effect was a poem's 'nonsense'. A brief examination of the penultimate stanza will suffice for the purposes of illuminating this key debate in understanding *The Bell's* approach to modernism:

One light, one light, in bone and flower,

One periphrastic, impenetrable power,
 One dark successive light, one weave
 Of bone and flesh, one mute intolerable hour
 When all is none, and all is power
 And the violence of the rose, and all
 The saintly flower, concupiscent with death,
 The flowering bone, the flowering breath
 In labour, one shape and season,
 Rose of extinction and rebirth.³³

O'Faoláin agreed with Taylor that poetry can often challenge the limits of our interpretation. However, he diverged from the poetry editor only in degree, not in fundamentals. For O'Faoláin, the distinction lay with "a mind that concentrates on communication outward and of a mind content with communication inward". In the case of the latter, their poetry became the "poetry of frustration, and their meanings became highly equivocal and debateable. They had lost touch with universals." O'Faoláin remains wedded to objective depiction over subjective rumination. His hard-headed realism always trumps any bend towards modernism.

In the end, O'Faoláin and Taylor shook hands on the issue, with O'Faoláin happy to concede to his poetry editor's authority, and in a final paragraph which is important in the way it delineates his attitude to modernism he confesses,

I think the Poetry Editor has me here, because if he had, by some strange fortune, got hold of 'The Wasteland' in manuscript, and brought it to me, I admit that I would have fought against that too. I also refuse to believe in Joyce's 'Finnegans Wake'.³⁴

In sum, *The Bell* and its editors were acutely conscious of developments in modernist aesthetics both in the literary and in the visual spheres. While in the plastic arts their magazine was frequently adventurous and futuristic, for literature – at least in its editorial outlook – *The Bell* was not just not modernist, but anti-modernist. For O’Faoláin worried, like W. B. Yeats in ‘Under Ben Bulbin’, that Irish writing was in danger of growing up “All out of shape from toe to top”, and he was determined to maintain his own tastes for nineteenth-century formal orthodoxy rather than go down the road of modernist fragmentation and subjectivity.³⁵ For his successor, Peadar O’Donnell, literature was always secondary to socialist politics and though experimental fiction and poetry did continue to appear up to the magazine’s closure in 1954 from writers like Flann O’Brien, Patrick Kavanagh and John Hewitt, the aesthetic outlook of *The Bell* remained essentially conservative and realist. Despite their personal outlook, it is to O’Faoláin’s and O’Donnell’s credit that they exposed their reading public to changes in the modernist movement despite not being invested in it themselves.

¹ Anonymous, ‘Envoy’, *The Irish Times* (21 October 1950), 6.

² ‘Foreword’, *Envoy: An Irish Review of Literature and Art*, vol. 4, no. 13 (December 1950), 7.

³ F. F. ‘On the Importance of Being Earnest’, *The Standard* (29 June 1951), 6.

⁴ Lauren Arrington, ‘Irish Modernism and its Legacies’, *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland*, ed. Richard Bourke and Ian McBride (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), 249.

⁵ Margaret Drabble (ed.), entry on ‘Modernism’, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, sixth edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 682-83.

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- ⁶ Sean Latham, 'Serial Modernism', in Gregory Castle (ed.), *A History of the Modernist Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 264, 267.
- ⁷ Quoted in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (ed.), *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume I, Britain and Ireland 1880-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2.
- ⁸ See Suzanne Churchill and Adam McKible (ed.), *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), *passim*.
- ⁹ Arrington, 'Irish Modernism and its Legacies', 249.
- ¹⁰ Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (1948; repr. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), 4.
- ¹¹ Seán O'Faoláin, 'This is Your Magazine', *The Bell*, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1940), 5.
- ¹² O'Faolain, 'This is Your Magazine', 6, 8.
- ¹³ Joe Cleary would have O'Faoláin as "one of the major architects of the modernizing programme" of the Irish twentieth century. See Joe Cleary, 'Distress Signals: Sean O'Faolain and the Fate of Twentieth-Century Irish Literature', *Field Day Review*, 5 (2009), 49. Mark S. Quigley points out, in a recent essay, to a failure on Cleary's part to examine O'Faoláin's earlier, leftist republican legacy more closely. See Quigley, 'Modernization's Lost Pasts: Sean O'Faolain, the *Bell*, and Irish Modernization Before Lemass', *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 18, no. 4 (Winter/Geimhreadh, 2014), 44-67.
- ¹⁴ Quoted in Maurice Harmon, *Sean O'Faolain* (London: Constable, 1994), 145.
- ¹⁵ Sean O'Faolain, 'Attitudes', *The Bell*, vol. 2, no. 6 (September, 1941), 6, 12.
- ¹⁶ William Dean Howells, 'Editor's Study', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (November 1889), 966. Howells, a fellow Harvard man, was much admired by O'Faoláin.
- ¹⁷ Sean O'Faolain, 'For the Future', *The Bell*, vol. 1, no. 2 (November, 1940), 5.
- ¹⁸ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Attitudes', *The Bell*, vol. 2, no. 6 (September 1941), 12.
- ¹⁹ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Editorial', *The Bell*, vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1940), 6.
- ²⁰ Seán O'Faoláin, 'W. B. Yeats', *The English Review* (June 1935), 687.
- ²¹ Seán O'Faoláin, *An Irish Journey*, ill. Paul Henry (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940), 299.
- ²² Seán O'Faoláin, 'Signing Off', *The Bell*, vol. XII, no. 1 (April, 1946), 2.
- ²³ Peadar O'Donnell, 'Signing On', *The Bell*, vol. XII, no. 1 (April, 1946), 5.
- ²⁴ Austin Clarke, 'Recent Poetry', *The Irish Times* (19 January 1946), 4.
- ²⁵ This may be Frank Harvey's first time in print. He went on to be a distinguished lyric poet, publishing several collections, the best known of which is *The Boa-Island Janus* (1996). Publishing under the name Francis Harvey, he lived from 1925-2014.
- ²⁶ Frank Harvey, 'Public Opinion', *The Bell*, vol. XII, no. 3 (June 1946), 257.
- ²⁷ On Iremonger and *Envoy*, see Frank Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical 1923-1958* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 132-37.
- ²⁸ Valentin Iremonger, 'Aspects of Poetry To-Day', *The Bell*, vol. XII, no. 3 (June 1946), 247.
- ²⁹ Valentin Iremonger, 'The Poems of Freda Laughton', *The Bell*, vol. XI, no. 4 (January 1946), 897-900.
- ³⁰ On this movement, see Róisín Kennedy, 'Experimentalism or Mere Chaos? The White Stag Group and the Reception of Subjective Art in Ireland', in Edwina Keown and Carol Taaffe (ed.), *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), 179-94.
- ³¹ Alex Davis, 'The Irish Modernists', in Matthew Campbell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 78.

³² Seán O'Faoláin, 'Sense and Nonsense in Poetry', *The Bell*, vol. 7, no. 2 (November 1943), 156.

³³ Nick Nicholls, 'The Bone and the Flower', *The Bell*, vol. 7, no. 2 (November 1943), 166.

³⁴ O'Faoláin, 'Sense and Nonsense in Poetry', 161.

³⁵ W. B. Yeats, 'Under Ben Bulbin', *The Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1963), 400.